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ABSTRACT

This study clarifies the relationship between children's social desirability (CSD) response tendencies and their withdrawal from classroom achievement situations by investigating the effects of the child's expectations of peer response. Data gathered included scores on the Children's Social Desirability Scale, scores on an expectancy of response scale constructed for this study, and teacher ratings. Subjects were 120 third and fourth grade boys and girls. No differences were found between high and low scoring CSD subjects on expectancy of negative response. Paradoxical relationships between response expectancy, response history, and withdrawal from classroom achievement situations were found for high CSD but not low CSD subjects. (Author)

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Relationship of Children's Social Desirability Response Tendencies to Their Expectations of Response to Achievement Behaviors in Classrooms

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Abstract

This study clarifies the relationship between children's social desirability (CSD) response tendencies and their withdrawal from classroom achievement situations by investigating the effects of the child's expectations of peer response. Data gathered included scores on the Children's Social Desirability Scale, scores on an expectancy of response scale constructed for this study, and teacher ratings. Subjects were 120 third and fourth grade boys and girls. No differences were found between high and low scoring CSD subjects on expectancy of negative response. Paradoxical relationships between response expectancy, response history, and withdrawal from classroom achievement situations were found for high CSD but not low CSD subjects.

Deprecating remarks schoolchildren make about one another's achievements are a frequent concern of teachers. It has been noted (Biber et al 1942) that children frequently criticize and belittle the work of others, and one would expect that few children escape being the object of such remarks. While teachers sometimes appreciate the support for achievement activities such remarks provide, they are usually more seriously worried about the effects of these remarks on the target child. In spite of this, little investigation has been conducted into peer classroom criticism, children's perceptions of it, and the effects of their expectations of criticism on their achievement behavior. If, as Veroff (1969) suggests, and others corroborate, middle childhood is the period when social comparison motivation becomes the most important achievement motivation, it would be expected that social concerns would play a critical role in levels of achievement behavior children display. One factor that is expected to make a difference in the way children interpret and respond to their peer criticism is the degree to which they are concerned about their social desirability or the good opinions of others. The purpose of the present study is to clarify the relationship between children's social desirability response tendencies and their withdrawal from classroom achievement situations by investigating the effects of children's expectation of peer response and their history of having received classroom criticism.

The relationship between children's concern for the good opinion of others, as measured by scores on the Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire (CSD), and their tendency to withdraw from social and achievement situations has been documented (Crandall, 1966; Lahderne and Jackson, 1970). Investigation into antecedents of social desirability response tendencies (Allaman, Joyce, and Crandall, 1972) suggests that "harsh" parental behavior is associated with higher social desirability scores. They suggest that in order to understand the behavior of individuals with high CSD scores one must take their expectance of reinforcement into account, and that the avoidance tendencies frequently found by research are due to the greater amounts of negative parental reinforcement they had generally experienced. They also suggest that if such individuals expect greater approval for more assertive behavior, they will be more likely to display this behavior, in keeping with their enhanced concern with the good opinion of others.

A previous study (Potter, 1974) indicated that the amount of seeking of public response opportunities of 3rd and 5th grade girls was strongly negatively correlated with the expectation that a poor public performance would bring criticism from classmates. Since the CSD was not administered to these children, it was impossible to assess whether, as Allaman et al suggest, this expectancy of criticism that was associated with withdrawal behavior was in fact a concomitant of high SD concerns. The finding does suggest that expected peer response is salient to children's decisions about participation in their classrooms, and raises the issue of how expectancy of rejections from peers is related to scores on the CSD. One would expect that high scoring CSD children, being more attuned to the responses of others, would be more affected by deprecating remarks than low CSD children.

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. Scores on a measure of expectancy of criticism for classroom participation will be higher for high CSD than for low CSD children.

2. Children who have received more criticism in class will expect more criticism to be given in class. Correlations between teacher ratings of criticism received and children's expectancy of criticism will be stronger for high CSD than for low CSD children.

3. Negative correlations between reported expectation of criticism and participation and positive correlations between reported expectations of praise and participation will be stronger for high CSD than for low CSD children.

Methodology: In order to investigate the matter, an expectancy of criticism scale was devised. Items consisted of descriptions of achievement-related behaviors that demonstrated mild incompetence (such as being called on in class and not knowing the answer) for which the child could indicate that he expected a negative reaction, a positive reaction, or that there would be no evaluative reaction from the particular agent named in the item. Six items were used in each of five sub-scales, assessing the expected reactions of boys, girls, and teacher, and the child's expected reaction to a girl and to a boy classmate who display the described behavior. The examiner read the scale aloud as the children followed and marked their answers. The 30 item total scale had a split-half reliability of .832. Statistical analysis revealed no strong factor structure, and that all items were positively correlated with the total scale. Therefore, subscales by behavior were constructed in order to assess achievement behaviors on which children with high or low CSD scores would be differentiated. Split-half reliability of the 5-item subscales scored for negative answers ranged from .352 to .549.

A sociometric question and the Children's Social Desirability Scale were then administered. The CSD presents a child with 48 yes-no items stated so that the child can only answer them in a socially desirable manner by asserting (presumably falsely) that he has an undeviating socially desirable attitude or behavior. For example, the student high in social desirability concerns would answer "yes" to questions

such as "When you make a mistake, do you always admit you are wrong?" and "Do you always do the right things?" and "no" to questions such as "Are there times when you don't like to do what your parents tell you?" and "Have you ever felt like saying unkind things to a person?".

Teacher ratings of each child's classroom participation, attention, achievement, and criticism by herself and others were obtained in order to assess the children's experiences with criticism and their participation in achievement activities. Several of the ratings proved to be highly correlated, and factor analysis of ratings suggested the construction of two scales, descriptively labeled, Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives and Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities.

The subjects were the 120 children in the four third-fourth grade multiage classrooms in a school in a predominantly white middle-class suburban neighborhood. There were 61 boys and 59 girls.

Validity of the expectance of criticism scale was suggested by the positive correlation of scores with Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives ($r = .209$, $p = .013$) and the negative correlation with Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities ($r = -.240$, $p = .005$).

Children were divided into high and low CSD groups (using the median split method described by Harter, 1975) for further analysis. Group means and standard deviation on the CSD were as follows: High CSD boys, mean = 27.889, s.d. = 5.33; Low CSD boys, mean = 11.714, s.d. = 5.695, High CSD girls, mean = 26.448, s.d. = 5.968; Low CSD girls, mean = 13.500, s.d. = 4.528.

Results:

As previous research would predict, third graders had significantly higher CSD scores than fourth graders ($F = 6.369$, $p = .013$). Also predicted was the negative correlation of CSD scores with teacher rating of amount of classroom participation for the total group ($r = -.260$, $p = .003$). Unexpectedly, there was no

significant sex difference on CSD scores, and as Table 1 demonstrates, the negative correlation between CSD scores and classroom participation, found by Lahaderne and Jackson (1970) to be significant in girls but not boys, appears in the present sample to be significant in boys but not in girls. The correlations in both studies are consistently negative, however, for both boys and girls.

Specific hypotheses and related findings and discussion follows.

1. Scores on a measure of expectancy of criticism for classroom participation will be higher for high CSD than for low CSD children.

This hypothesis is based on the previously noted suggestion made by Allaman Joyce, and Crandall (1972) that high CSD individuals have received more criticism than low CSD individuals and so expect to receive more criticism. This hypothesis was not supported in the present study. As Table 2 indicates, there is no significant difference in expectancy of negative classroom response. However, when the data are analyzed seperately by sex (Table 3), high CSD girls are higher in expectancy of negative response, but this difference is not found in boys.

Further analysis of data reveals that there were significant differences between high and low CSD children if one examined answers scored in a positive direction (for expectancy of positive classroom response). For such answers, in which the child indicated that mildly incompetent achievement behavior would result in classmates thinking one smart or accepting one, high CSD children had higher scores (Table 2). In this case, however, it is the scores of the boys, and not the girls, that show significant CSD differences (Table 3), although in both sexes high CSD children report that they expect more positive responses. Insofar as one would be unlikely to receive positive responses for being only mildly incompetent, it does seem that children who expect to receive positive reinforcement are being unrealistic.

The data were also analyzed for the expectancy of criticism scale scored for expectation of neutral "Wouldn't think anything of it" responses to incompetent

achievement behavior. Significant differences between high and low CSD children were found, with low CSD children giving more reports of expectations of neutral response to incompetent achievement behavior. Significant differences were found for both girls and boys (Table 3).

2. Children who have received more criticism in class will expect more criticism to be given in class. Correlations between teacher ratings of criticism received and children's expectancy of criticism will be stronger for high CSD than for low CSD children.

This hypothesis addresses the issue of accuracy of perception of likelihood of receiving criticism from classmates. It would be expected that those who have received more criticism would be more likely to expect criticism, and that this relationship would be stronger for the high CSD children who would be expected to be more sensitive to social cues.

It was found that for the total group, scores on expectation of criticism were significantly positively correlated to teacher rating of criticism child receives ($r=.209$, $p=.013$), indicating that expectations of criticism are generally an accurate reflection of the child's actual experiences. However, the hypothesized stronger relationship between criticism received and criticism expected for high CSD children was not found (Table 3). Indeed a significant correlation between criticism expected and received was found for the low CSD children but not the high CSD children. This suggests that children who are not as concerned about the good opinion of others are more likely to base their expectancy of receiving criticism on their actual experience.

3. Negative correlations between reported expectation of criticism and participation and positive correlations between reported expectations of praise and participation will be stronger for high CSD than for low CSD children.

Since high CSD children should, by definition,be more concerned about the opinions of others, one would expect their expectations of response to be more sensitively re-

flected in their behavior than in the behavior of children less concerned with others' opinions. Allaman et al (1972) suggest that high CSD children's customary withdrawal from participation is due to having received more criticism; thus they expect more criticism for participation. One could likewise assume that those high CSD children who expect a more positive response should participate more frequently, in order to gain the positive reinforcement that they prize more highly than do low CSD children.

This was not found to be the case. As Table 4 indicates, negative correlations between reported expectation of criticism and teacher-ratings of classroom participation were not stronger for high CSD than for low CSD children, nor were positive correlations between reported expectations of praise and participation stronger for high CSD than for low CSD children. Rather, the reverse was true. The high CSD children's participation was unrelated to their expectation of criticism, but the low SD children's participation was related to reported expectancy of criticism, with those who expected more criticism participating less often. Also contrary to the hypothesis reported expectations of positive response by high CSD children was significantly negatively correlated to the amount of their participation in class. Positive scores were not correlated with the participation of low CSD children. Thus it does appear that the stated higher positive expectations of high CSD children may be a defensive response, since these expectations are not evident in the behaviors they exhibit.

An examination of correlations between expectation of neutral responses and behavior is instructive, for here we do find that active participation of high CSD and of low CSD children is positively correlated with their expecting neutral, non-evaluative reactions. This is especially important for high CSD children, for it indicates that the expectation of a non-evaluative response is most functional for their classroom participation, more functional than expecting positive responses.

Apparently, children who are concerned about the good opinion of others feel free to participate only if they interpret the situation as being one in which their behavior will elicit neither positive nor negative response, but rather that no one will evaluate them on the basis of their behavior. Participation of low CSD children is also facilitated by such a perception.

Conclusions

The present study did not find the straightforward relationship between expected reinforcement and participation of high CSD children predicted on the basis of previous research and theory. Indeed, it is for the low CSD child that reported expectancy of response and participation are more reasonably correlated. While the investigation of the relationship between expected negative response and participation was the initial focus for the study, the paradoxical relationships between expected positive response and participation and expected neutral response and participation appear to be more useful in providing clues to the withdrawn behavior frequently seen in high CSD children.

High CSD children report greater expectations of positive response and such expectations are negatively correlated with their participation. It is likely that high reported positive expectations are defensive, since it is unlikely that participation that is only mildly incompetent would really bring the expected praise. Indeed, if one uses sociometric status as an indication of the child's accurate interpretation of peer behavior, expectations of positive responses are correlated negatively with sociometric status, and so are likely to be inaccurate. However, the items on the CSD are slanted to adult, rather than peer, approval, and it is possible that children who are greatly concerned about adult approval may inaccurately interpret peer reactions. Children generally expect more positive responses from teachers than peers, and so high CSD children seem to be expecting children to reward "trying" in class, just as most children feel the teacher is more likely to do.

It must be remembered that the data on participation and criticism received come from teacher ratings, rather than naturalistic observation and that the expectancy of criticism scale, while giving superficial indications of reliability (described above) has not been thoroughly tested. Despite such methodological flaws, it seems clear that expecting that what one does will bring either a positive or a negative evaluation of oneself from classmates, is related to less active classroom participation in high CSD children. Further investigation is needed to assess the actual responses high and low CSD children do get from classmates, in order to assess the accuracy of their reported perceptions. It does seem clear that the expected reactions of peers is an important factor to children in this age period, and the relationship of social desirability concerns to expected peer reactions and to the participation of children in classroom academic activities bears further investigation.

Several implications for practice emerge from this study. Since the participation of low as well as high CSD children is correlated with expectations of neutral, non-evaluative response, it must be recommended that teachers not accentuate the emphasis on evaluation in their classrooms. Further investigation is needed to assess the actual responses high and low CSD children do get from classmates and teachers. The findings suggest, however that teachers not give excessive positive feedback, which may diminish participation of high CSD chidlren much as one might expect excessive negative feedback would do.

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Table I

Correlations of scores on Children's Social Desirability Scale with Teacher ratings of participation and criticism received, for total group and children grouped by sex

Children's Social Desirability Scale Scores	Teacher rating of child participation in achievement activities (high rating indicates more participation)	Teacher rating of criticism child receives (high rating indicates more criticism)
Total group n=110	-.260***	.078
Boys n= 55	-.423***	.184
Girls n=55	-.087	-.049

*p=.1
**p=.05
***p=.01

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and results of analysis of variance for effect of social desirability concern level on measures for total group

Measures	Children low on level of social desirability concern (n=54)		Children high on level of social desirability concern (n=56)		f(1,108)	p(if .1 or less)
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.		
Sociometric status (low is low status)	2.19	.93	1.70	.81	8.65	.004
Teacher rating of criticism child receives (high rating indicates more criticism)	6.83	2.72	6.98	3.01	.074	n.s.
Teacher rating of child participation in achievement activities (high rating indicates more participation)	9.28	2.14	8.21	2.35	6.12	.014
Expectancy of positive classroom response	5.18	2.95	6.94	4.14	6.55	.011
Expectancy of negative classroom response	8.98	4.84	10.14	5.19	1.47	n.s.
Expectancy of neutral classroom response	15.83	4.62	12.91	6.56	7.237	.008

Table 3

Means, standard deviations, and results of analysis of variance for effects of social desirability concern level on measures for children grouped by sex

	Girls					Boys				
	Low level of social desirability concern (n=26)		High level of social desirability concern (n=29)		f(1,53) p(if .1 or less)	Low level of social desirability concern (n=28)		High level of social desirability concern (n=27)		f(1,53 p(if .1 or less)
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.		mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	
Sociometric status	2.15	.83	1.79	.77	2.77 .098	2.21	1.03	1.59	.84	5.96 .017
Teacher rating of criticism child receives (high rating indicates more criticism)	6.58	2.58	6.31	2.67	.141 n.s.	7.07	2.86	7.70	3.23	.59 n.s.
Teacher rating of child participation in achievement activities (high rating indicates more participation)	9.42	1.81	8.86	2.57	.853 n.s.	9.14	2.43	7.52	1.91	7.56 .008
Expectancy of positive classroom response	5.88	2.50	6.69	4.07	.758 n.s.	4.53	3.21	7.22	4.28	6.96 .011
Expectancy of negative classroom response	7.84	4.22	10.21	5.39	3.22 .075	10.03	5.2	10.07	5.07	.001 n.s.
Expectancy of neutral classroom response	16.27	4.39	13.10	6.23	4.639 .034	15.43	4.88	12.70	7.01	2.81 .095

Table 4

Correlations between expectancy of classroom response and sociometric status and teacher ratings

Measures	Expectancy of positive classroom response	Expectancy of negative classroom response	Expectancy of neutral classroom response
Sociometric status	-.204* (-.216)*	-.082 (-.085)	.217* (.204)*
Teacher rating of criticism child receives	.044 (-.068)	.239** (.137)	-.278** (-.065)
Teacher rating of child participation in achievement activities	.084 (-.377)***	-.312** (-.063)	.273** (.288)**

* p=.1
** p=.05
*** p=.10

Number not in parenthesis indicates r value for children low in level of social desirability concern (n = 54)

Number in parenthesis indicates r value for children high in level of social desirability concern (n = 56)